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## HENRY SIDGWICK.

HENRY SIDGWICK, who died at Terling Place, Essex, on the 28th of August last, was one of the three or four most prominent philosophical writers, and by far the keenest philosophical critic, of his day in England. He was born in 1838, the son of a Yorkshire clergyman and one of a family of scholars, and was educated at Rugby School and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He graduated 33rd Wrangler and Senior Classic in 1859, was elected a Fellow of Trinity in the same year, and at once appointed to a college lectureship. For the last forty-one years of his life he was almost continuously occupied in educational work at Cambridge. In 1875 his lectureship was transformed into the office of Praelector of Moral and Political Philosophy; he resigned this office in 1883, but was in the same year appointed to the Knightbridge professorship of Moral Philosophy. He held the professorship till the end of May in the present year, when the knowledge that he had been stricken by a dangerous illness led to his resignation.

Sidgwick's reputation in the world of letters was made in 1874 by the publication of "The Methods of Ethics." But before that date he was known to a large circle of friends in Cambridge, Oxford, and London, as a man of subtle and perfectly balanced intelligence, of great brilliance in discussion, and of unique personal charm. It was known, too, that his sensitive and upright moral principle had led in 1869 to his resignation of his Fellowship at Trinity, because he was no longer able to accept the theological test which he had with good conscience subscribed to on his admission, and which was, at that time, still required of persons admitted to fellowships.\* The problem,

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\*Under the statutes then in force all persons admitted to degrees in the Universities had to declare themselves *bonâ fide* members of the Church of England. A more stringent test was required of persons admitted to fellowships. Sidgwick resigned on the 15th October, 1869. "The effect," says a contemporary, "was decisive." "Among residents a body of opinion

which involved this sacrifice in its solution, forms the subject of his first independent publication, "The Ethics of Conformity and Subscription" (1870).

Since the publication of the "Methods of Ethics," Sidgwick's unwearied literary activity has been shown by his elaborate volumes, the "Principles of Political Economy" (1883), and the "Elements of Politics" (1891). He contributed fourteen articles to *Mind*, besides numerous critical notices and discussions, and several articles to this JOURNAL. These latter and some other essays—several of them addresses to Ethical Societies—have been collected into a volume of "Practical Ethics" (1898). His works include also "The Scope and Method of Economic Science" (1885), his Presidential Address to the Economic Section of the British Association, and "Outlines of the History of Ethics" (1886), a largely extended reprint of his article "Ethics," contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. At the time of his death he had been for some years at work on a political treatise in which the abstract method of the "Elements" is supplemented by historical study of political forms, and on a systematic metaphysical inquiry. It is hoped that considerable portions of these may be in a sufficiently advanced state to admit of publication. Many of his occasional articles also should be rescued from the usual fate of such literature. Among these the article on "Bentham and Benthamism," which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1877 may be mentioned, as now little known and difficult to obtain.

In addition to his literary and teaching work, Sidgwick took

crystallized, and it was found, to the surprise of many, that the majority had become favorable to abolition." On the 29th November following, at a meeting held in St. John's College Lodge, the agitation for the abolition of the tests was set on foot. "A similar meeting was held two days before at Oxford," but "it was on receipt of intelligence of the new move at Cambridge that the Oxford meeting was taken in hand." Sidgwick's action also determined the reformers to agitate for the abolition of the test on admission to fellowships as well as of that on admission to degrees (other than degrees in divinity). The tests were abolished by Act of Parliament in 1871. See Sir George Young, in *The Cambridge Review*, 1st November, 1900.

his full share of academic business. An unusually busy man, he never seemed to be hurried for time, and had the secret of utilizing the odd quarters-of-an-hour which are commonly wasted between different engagements. His wide sympathies, practical wisdom, and complete disinterestedness made him a trusted leader both in ordinary business and in many reforms and new departures. He speaks somewhere in his "Ethics" of a lively interest in fairly prosperous institutions as one of the great sources of happiness. It cannot be said that the University ever realized all his ideals of what a University ought to be as a place of education and of original work; but it has been, at least, a "fairly prosperous institution;" and he cannot but have been aware that its prosperity was due in no small measure to his active devotion to its well-being. His services to the cause of the higher education of women are well known. From the first he was its most active and devoted supporter; and he remained throughout his life the most powerful advocate, the wisest counsellor, and the most generous friend of the movement. He also took a generous, if less prominent, part in the development of the provision for scientific study and research which has distinguished Cambridge during the past generation.

As a philosophical and ethical teacher Sidgwick founded no school. Cambridge does not provide a field such as T. H. Green found open at Oxford for "those who have a faith to communicate." At Oxford philosophy has a place assigned it in the school which both from its traditions and from its numbers is the most important in the University; at Cambridge, it is not combined with classical or other studies, but has a place of its own; its students have the whole of their time for its pursuit; and the number of English undergraduates for whom such a curriculum is adapted can never be large. If the Moral Sciences Tripos has a position in the estimation of university and college authorities far higher than the mere number of its students can account for, this position is largely due to the influence of Sidgwick, to his care in organizing the philosophical teaching, to his own untiring zeal as a lecturer, and to the distinction which his reputation gave to the department of which

he was the chief representative. Sidgwick exerted a powerful influence, both intellectual and moral, upon his pupils. But his temperament was too critical, his intellect too evenly balanced, to admit of his teaching a dogmatic system. He had certainly disciples for his own special forms of doctrine; but they were never very numerous, and of late years perhaps had not increased in number. What he taught was much more a method, an attitude of mind; and his teaching was a training in the philosophical temper—in candor, self-criticism, and regard for truth. He had himself arrived at and formulated a definite set of doctrines, at least in ethics, politics, and economics: probably also in many questions of metaphysics. But these were not rounded off into a system. His adherence to one side in a philosophical controversy was always tempered by a due regard for the elements of truth in the opposed theory. The most notable example of this is his attitude to the hedonist tradition in English ethics. His “*Methods of Ethics*” was accepted by the representatives of that tradition as a most powerful argument for Utilitarianism or (as he termed it) Universalistic Hedonism; but Sidgwick saw that the theory could be rationally maintained only by relinquishing the view which almost all his predecessors had regarded as proving it, the view that pleasure is the only possible object of desire. This careful distinction of problems, which he carried out in many other questions, enabled him to maintain a balanced and independent position between the purely rationalist and the purely empirical schools.

On the whole he may be regarded as in ethics, politics, and economics belonging to the same school as J. S. Mill, but as having still further refined its doctrines. He was the first leading English thinker of this tradition who brought to bear upon it the scholarship and special training of the universities. He had a scholar’s sympathy with Intellectualism; and sought to combine the formal ethical principles of the Intellectual school with the content of empirical hedonism. To this extent his theory is eclectic; but it is an eclecticism reached by a thorough criticism of each of two rival doctrines. Criticism exhibits something of real value in each view, and these ele-

ments of value are taken up into the new theory. Sidgwick's clear insight made it impossible for him to overlook the difficulties in the way of rounding off his beliefs into a complete theory of life. The supreme aim he put forward for conduct—"Universal Happiness, desirable consciousness or feeling for the innumerable multitude of living beings, present and to come,"—was defended as "an end that satisfies our imagination by its vastness, and sustains our resolution by its comparative security." But no one has pointed out so clearly and convincingly as he has done the difficulties which surround any attempt to measure the value of conduct by its effects in producing this "desirable consciousness or feeling." It is almost as if he wished to forewarn his pupils and readers against the enthusiasm which had given to Utilitarianism the passion and purpose of a creed in the minds of J. S. Mill and other disciples of Bentham. In perfect candor he rivalled J. S. Mill, and he far excelled him in technical knowledge of philosophy and in critical subtlety, but he was without that conviction of the truth and social importance of a simple set of beliefs which made Mill's influence so potent. Sidgwick had to see all round a question, to observe the weaknesses as well as the strength of every position. He seemed to take delight in standing on ground which would bear his weight, but nothing more, in poising himself on a height where only his perfect nerve could maintain him in equilibrium. It is therefore not surprising if he did not fill the minds of his hearers with devotion for a doctrine or a creed. Admiration, rather than imitation, was the most fitting attitude for others to adopt. But upon those who could receive it, his teaching had a finer effect than enthusiasm for any set of beliefs; it communicated an enthusiasm for truth itself: the rigor of self-criticism as well as the ardor of inquiry. Severely intellectual in his method of instruction, if his teaching was touched by emotion at all, it was the *amor intellectualis veritatis* that inspired it.

Sidgwick's views on general philosophy are not marked by any great unifying conception. And this want would seem to be a consequence of his whole mental attitude. His loyalty to reason made it impossible for him to rest content with hypo-

thetical solutions: no *μᾶθος* was allowed to give imaginative completeness where logic had failed to systematize. The view, often put forward more or less explicitly in these days, that feeling and will have rights in the determination of one's philosophy was not his. Weight was given to purely intellectual considerations only. And he seems to have expected to reach the final synthesis (if at all) by the same kind of reasons as those which establish departmental truths. Perhaps it is not fanciful to connect with this characteristic the motive which led him to devote so much time and labor to the investigation of the elusive phenomena which make a special claim to be known as "psychical." He was one of the founders and the first president of the Society for Psychical Research; and the scientific character of the Society's work is in all probability largely due to his influence. He fully recognized the strange mixture of conscious and unconscious deception in the mass of evidence brought before the Society; but he seems to have arrived at the conclusion that, after all necessary sifting, the alleged facts were sufficient to establish the hypothesis of telepathy—that, under certain unknown conditions, communications could pass from mind to mind without the usual intermediation of the senses. Further light than this on the destiny of the soul he did not find; and it is noteworthy that even the hypothesis of telepathy does not seem to have been utilized or referred to by him in the writings which he gave to the world as contributions to philosophy.

Sidgwick was not without the desire to see things as a whole, which is the impulse that leads to system. But he had himself felt the difficulties in the way; and he was an unsparing critic of every attempt at unity—especially those made in the two most important movements of his time, the speculative construction of T. H. Green, and the more ambitious theory of natural evolution put forward by Mr. Spencer. With both these writers he carried on some controversies, and neither, it must be said, was his match in dialectics. He had an unerring instinct for the weak places of an argument; and the impression his criticisms are apt to leave with us is that all constructive systems owe their impressiveness to a certain vagueness at the

critical points of the proof. By these criticisms he rendered a service of great value to clear thinking; and their value will be increased if they lead to an adequate discussion of the kind of proof required for the vindication of a general or philosophical point of view.

It was not of philosophical theories only that Sidgwick was a great critic, but also of those vaguer ideas, emotions, and desires which make up the inner life of man. The third book of his "*Methods of Ethics*," entitled "*Intuitionism*," consists in large part of an analysis of the *Morality of Common Sense*,—a sympathetic elucidation and examination of the moral notions which, whether expressed in books or not, form the ethical inheritance of the average educated man of the present day. Nothing that he has ever done excels this portion of his work. In it he has made conscious and explicit what is in all men's minds, and has summed up its significance. It may be presumptuous even to guess at the verdict of posterity; but perhaps it will turn out that this book will retain a permanent value, even if the careful construction and criticism of theories on various topics which he has put forward should be superseded. It does for the cultured Englishman of the latter half of the nineteenth century what Aristotle, in his "*Ethics*," did for the Athenian of his time. The permanent interest of its subject-matter and the severe distinction of its style mark it as a classic.

It is impossible to close this notice without referring to the sense of loss under which the University term has begun. Life will be a poorer thing to very many; and there are not a few who feel that the wisest and the justest man they have ever known has passed away.

W. R. SORLEY.

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